

CHAPTER 21

ENGLISH BIBLES



This name / which not of blodis. neþ of
þe will of fleiþþ. neþ of þe will of man
but be born of God / & þe word þis goddis
sone. is made fleiþþ of mā. & hard wek
had / & we han seyn þe gloze of hi. þe
Blaze as of soon biwet u of þe fadir. þe
sone ful of grace & of treweþe // Joha be
w Witnesþig of hi. & erþer seþeþ þis

ENGLISH BIBLE A.D. 1350

PRE-WYCLIFFE



Before Wycliffe

1300s

Where was the Bible before the KJV of 1611? The Gothic Bible contained the kernel of today's English King James Bible. Its Germanic seed sprouted in the Anglo-Saxon Bible. The bud burst forth in the 12th and 13th centuries *before* it bloomed with the watering of Wycliffe, Coverdale, and Tyndale. Today the King James Bible sends forth the sweet scent of the full bloom. A comparison of several verses from Middle English Bibles reveals that neither Wycliffe's nor the King James Bible was the 'first' English Bible.

The previously pictured "specimen of early English, from a MS. Bible, about 1350 — thirty years **before** the publication of Wycliffe's translation" [c. 1382] reads *roughly* as follows from part of John 1:12-15 (Scott, pp. 174, 175).

"his name/ which not of blod. neth(er) of
the will of fleisth. neth(er) of the will of
man but be born of God/ and the word
(this is God's Son) was mead fleisth (or
man) and hay dwellid...us/ and we han
seyen the glore of him the glorie as of the
oon bigetn of the fadir the sone ful of
grace and of treuthe/ John bear
witnessig of him and cryeth seyige/ This

The KJV echoes as follows:

"his name: Which were born, not of blood,
nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of

man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the **only begotten** of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried saying, This...”

Notice that the pre-Wycliffe 1350 Bible uses the phrase, “oon bigetn,” similar to the KJV’s “only begotten.” The TNIV and NIV and most new versions deflower the virgin birth by plucking off yet another petal here.


The Lord Chancellor of England in the early 1500s “says he could show English Bibles **earlier than Wycliffe’s**.” He writes:


“The hole byble was **long before Wycliffe’s** days by vertuous and will learned men, translated **into the English tong**; and by good and godly people with devotion, and soberness, wel and reverently red”...“as for olde translacions, **before Wycliffes** time, they remain lawful and be in some folks handes. Myself have seen, and can show you, Bybles fair and olde, **in Englyshe**, which haue been known and seen by the Byshoppe of the Diocese, and left in laymanes handes and womenes...” (taken in part from *Dyalogues*, 1530, p. 138, as cited in Dore, 2nd edition, pp. 1, 2).

Thomas Cranmer is said to have memorized the *entire* New Testament. He was burned at the stake in 1556, sixteen years after he penned the preface to the Great Bible of 1540, wherein he said,

“...it was translated and read in the Saxons Tongue, whiche at that tyme was our mother tongue, where of there remayne yet diuerse copies found...of such antique maner of wryting and speaking, that fewe men nowe be able to read and vnderstand them. And when this language waxed old and out of common vsage, bycause folke should not lacke the fruit of reading, it was again translated into the newer language, where of yet also many copies remayne, and be dayly founde,” (prologue to the Great Bible, 2nd edition, as cited in Dore, 2nd ed., p. 2).

Dore adds, “That the Psalter and other portions of the **Old and New Testament** were translated from the [Old] Latin into English at various times from the **7th century to the 14th** there can be no doubt” (Dore, 2nd ed., p. 3).

 “In fact, **before** the middle of the 14th century the entire **Old Testament** and the greater part of the **New Testament** had been translated into the **Anglo-Norman dialect** of the period” (*EB*. s.v. Bible, English, p. 895).

 “In the North Midlands, and in the North even **before** the middle of the 14th century, the **Psalms** had been twice rendered into **English**, and before the end of the same century, probably **before the great Wycliffite versions** had spread over the country, **the whole of the New Testament had been translated** by different hands into one or other of the dialects of this part of the country. At the same time we can record only a single rendering during the whole century which originated in the south of England namely the text of **James, Peter, 1 John, and the Pauline Epistles** (edited by A.C. Puaes, Cambridge, 1904). Of these **pre-Wycliffite** versions possibly the earliest is the West Midland Psalter...It occurs in three MSS. ...written

between 1340 and 1350” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 895). Psalm 1:1, 2 would likely have been *pronounced* much like the following,

“Blessed be the man that gedē nought in the council of wicked, ne stood nought in the way of sinners, ne sat nought in false judgement. Ac [But] his will was in the will of our Lord, and he shall think in his law both day and night.” (The actual spelling, with the ‘th’ and ‘g’ fonts updated, is as follows, “Blesced be the man that gedē nougt in the counseil of wicked, ne stode nougt in the waie of singeres, ne sat nougt in fals iugement. Ac hijs wyllē was in the wyllē of oure Lord, and he schal thenche in hijs lawe bothe daye and nygt’ (MS. British Museum. Add. 17376, as cited in the *EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 895; see *Old English Grammar*, 3rd edition, ed. Joseph Wright, Oxford University Press, p. 11 et al.).)



Dore notes that Richard Rolle made a Yorkshire translation of the “**New Testament**” (Dore, 2nd ed., p. 6). Rolle writes, “In this worke I seke no straunge Ynglys...” (Dore, 2nd ed., p. 5). During this period “Richard Rolle...turned into English...the famous *Commentary on Psalms* by Peter Lombard.” It reads as follows:

“Blisful man the whilk oway ged nought in the counsaile of wicked, and in the way of synful stode nocht, & in the chaiere of pestilens he nocht sate. Bot in laghe of lord the will of him; and in his laghe he sall thynke day & nyght” (MS. Univ. Coll. 64, as cited in *EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896).



“Approximately to the same period as these early renderings of the Psalter belong a version of the *Apocalypse [Revelation] with a Commentary*, the earliest MS. of which (Harleian 874) is written in the **dialect of the North Midlands**...[It] is really nothing but a verbal rendering of the popular and widely-spread Norman Commentary of the Apocalypse...which dates back as far as

the first half of the 13th century, and in its general tenor represents the height of orthodoxy. The English apocalypse, to judge from the number of MSS. remaining, must have enjoyed great and lasting popularity. Several revisions of the text exist, the later of which present **such striking agreement with the later Wyclifite version that we shall not be far wrong if we assume that they were made use of to a considerable extent by the revisers of this version**” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896).



“To the North Midlands or the North belongs further a complete version of the **Pauline Epistles** found in the unique MS. 32, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge...”

(*EB*, p. 896).



“**[T]he Gospels of St Matthew, St Mark and St Luke**, we are told by the heading in one of the MSS.

(Univ. Libr. Camb. li. 2. 12), were also translated into English by “a man of the north cuntre. The translation of these **Gospels** as well as of the **Epistles...**” is characterized by the following “lines of the third chapter of Matthew” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896).

“In tho dayes come Ihone baptist prechand in desert of the Iewry, & seyand, Do ge [ye] penaunce; forwhy the kyngdome of heuynne sal come negh. This is he of whome it was seide be Isay the prophete, sayand, “The voice of the cryand in the desert, redye ge [ye] the way of God, right made ge [ye] the lityl wayes of him.” & Ihone his klething of the hoerys of camels, & a gyrdyl of a skyn about his lendys; & his mete was the locust & hony of the wode” (MS. Camb. Univ. Libr. li. 2. 12., as cited in *EB*, p. 896).



“A version of the **Acts** and”...“**Epistles** completes the number of the New Testament books translated in the northern parts of England. It is found in several MSS. either separately or in conjunction with a fragmentary **Southern Version of the Pauline Epistles, Peter, James, and 1 John** in a curiously compiled volume...The translation of this, our only southern text, surpasses all previous efforts from the point of view of clearness of expression and idiomatic use of **English**, and though less exact, it may be even said in these respects to **rank equal with the later or revised Wycliffite version**” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896).



“Apart from these more or less complete versions of separate books of the Bible, there existed also...**translations of the epistles and gospels** used in divine service, and other means of familiarizing the people with Holy Scripture” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896.)

“It is noteworthy that these **early versions** from Anglo-Saxon times **onward** were perfectly orthodox, executed by and **for** good and faithful **sons** of the church...” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896).



Wycliffe's “Early Version, apart from its completeness, **shows but little advance upon preceding efforts**” admits the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 897). Wycliffe admits his friends helped him **gather many old English Bibles** (elde biblis) and the **interlinear English ‘glosses’** (comune glosis) as they were called. He states in his Preface, “First, this symple creature hadde myche trauaile, with diuerse felawis, and helperis, to gedere manie **elde biblis**, and othere doctouris, and **comune glosis**, and to make oo Latyn bible sumdel trew; and thanne to studie it of the newe, the text with **the glose**, and othere doctouris, as he mighte gete...” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 897).

The following comparison of pre-Wycliffe and Wycliffe Bibles documents that Wycliffe's Bible was merely a continuation of earlier English Bibles. Observe how the words and letters in **bold red type** in the **Wycliffe** Bibles in Psalm 1:1, 2 and Matt. 3:1-4 match those from **Pre-Wycliffe** Bibles.



Pre-Wycliffe

Psalm 1:1, 2

“Blisful man the whilk oway ged nocht in the counsaile of wicked, and in the way of synful stode nocht, & in the chaiere of pestilens he nocht sate. Bot in laghe of lord the will of him; and in his laghe he sall thynke day & nyght”
(MS. Univ. Coll. 64, as cited in *EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896).



Wycliffe (1382, 1st ed.)

Psalm 1:1, 2

“**Blisful the man that went not** awei **in the conseil** of vnпитыse, **and in the wei off sinful stod not; and in the chaer of pestilence sat not. But in the lawe of the Lord his wil; and in the lawe of hym he shal sweteli thenke dai and nig.**”



Wycliffe (1395, 2nd ed.)

Psalm 1:1, 2

“**Blessid is the man, that gede not in the council of wickid men; and stood not in the weie of synneris, and sat not in the chaier of pestilence. But his wille is in the lawe of the Lord; and he schal bithenke in the lawe of hym dai and nygt.**”



“In tho dayes come Ihone baptist prechand in desert of the Iewry, & seyand, Do ge [ye] penaunce; forwhy the kyngdome of heuayne sal come negh. This is he of whome it was seide be Isay the prophete, sayand, “The voice of the cryand in the desert, redye ge [ye] the way of God, right made ge [ye] the lityl wayes of him.” & Ihone his klething of the hoerys of camels, & a gyrdyl of a skyn about his lendys; & his mete was the locust & hony of the wode” (MS. Camb. Univ. Libr. li. 2. 12., as cited in *EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 896).

**Wycliffe** (1382, 1st ed.)**Matthew 3:1-4**

“**In thilke days came Ioon Baptist, prechyng in the desert of Iude, sayinge, Do ge penaunce, for the kyngdom of heuens shal neig, or cume nige.** Forsothe **this is he of whome it is said by Ysaye the prophet. A voice of a cryng in desert, Make ge redy the wayes of the Lord; make ge rightful the pathes of hym.** Forsothe that ilk **Ioon hadde cloth of the herris of cameylis, and a girdil of skyn aboute his leendis; sothely his mete weren locustis and hony of the wode**” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, English, p. 897).

**Wycliffe** (1395, 2nd ed.)**Matthew 3:1-4**

“**In tho daies Ioon Baptist cam, and prechide in the desert of Judee, and seide, Do ge penaunce, for the kyngdom of heuenes shal neige.** For **this is he, of whom it is seid bi Ysaie, the prophete, seyng, A vois of a crier in desert, Make ge redi the weies of the Lord; make ge rigt the pathis of hym. And this Ioon hadde clothing of camels heeris, and a girdil of skynne aboute his leendis; and his mete was honysoukis and hony of the wode**” (*EB*, s.v. Bible, p. 897).

The voice of the echoed **red** letters in this book cries out, like the **blood** of martyrs from Abel to Alban, testifying of God's word preserved to "all generations" (Ps. 33:11).

Summary

English Christians had the scriptures in written form **before** Wycliffe's edition of the late 1300s. Foxe records what he called "a certain old treatise, found in a certain ancient English book," probably written sometime between 1409 and 1531. It states that

"Also a man of London, whose name was Wyring, had a **Bible in English** of Northern speech, which was seen of many men, and it seemed to be **two hundred years old.**"

That would mean that it was written **before Wycliffe**, between 1330 and 1209 (Foxe, vol. 4, pp. 671, 674).

"The demand for the Bible became more **vocal** with Lollardism [Wycliffe's followers] in the fourteenth century..." Consequently, "During the fourteenth century the friars were the bitterest and most active opponents of an English Bible." "The Bible was dangerous" to the false teachers in the church of Rome (*Camb. Hist.*, vol. 2, pp. 384, 380, 382).

The **only existing records** of the early history of English Christians is from the authors cited: Tertullian (200s), Gildas (500s), Bede (700s), Asser (800s), William of Malmesbury (1100s), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (700-1200s), Wycliffe (1300s), Foxe and Cranmer (1500s). Anyone who challenges their first hand observations will have to do so from the time-fogged imaginations of modern writers whose motive is to re-mold men's minds to match their own unbelieving hearts.

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Corrupt Versions

- (ESV) *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2001, Wheaton IL: Crossway Bibles.
- (HCSB) *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, 2001, Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.
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- (NCV) *The Holy Bible, New Century Version*, Dallas: Word Bibles, 1993.
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